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game birds, even when he points one sitting on her nest. He will hold his point on any nest, if containing eggs or birds, as steadily as on a grouse or snipe, and, judging by the number found, few sets of this lark could have escaped my notice in the place we hunted.

The location of the nest may be almost anywhere on the ground, but the soil must be extremely dry. As a rule the birds scratch out a hole for themselves about two and one-half or three inches deep, both birds working, but I have found nests in the hoof prints of cattle, in cart ruts, holes made by dislodged stones and one that was placed in an unused golf hole. They are usually very frail, slight structures, though occasionally a bulky one is found, constructed of fine dead weeds. An exception to this rule was a very large nest well lined with grass, fir needles and feathers, which is shown in the illustration, *in situ*.

In some twenty-five or thirty nests examined, those containing two or three eggs to the set seemed to be about equally divided, so that either may be called the usual number. The sets found early in the season almost invariably are of two eggs, while three eggs to the set may be expected with almost equal certainty in the latter half of the

season. Only one set contained four eggs and I think this must be considered a very rare exception. The eggs differ greatly in color, the ground varying from a dark greenish-slate to a very light slate-white. The markings vary from a light gray to a deep greenish-red, more or less thickly sprinkled over the entire surface and usually being either confluent or ringed about the larger end.

In shape they vary considerably, some being long and rather slender, while others are more nearly round. The average of twenty-three eggs is .623x.826 inches, the largest measuring .64x.86 and the smallest, .59x.79 inches. Both birds assist in the duties of incubation and are seldom found at any great distance from each other during the entire nesting season. The males occasionally, towards evening, rise in a fluttering manner fifty or sixty feet into the air, uttering a very pleasing sort of twitter, which gradually develops into quite a little song as they reach the apex of the flight and descend. In spite of their fondness for a hot, dry locality, they are very partial to shade while incubating, as I have frequently found nests built under stones, large tin cans, boards, and on one occasion under a large piece of tarred paper which must have formed an admirable umbrella.

### Notes on the California Clapper Rail.

BY ERNEST ADAMS.

[Read before the Northern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club, Jan. 6, 1900.]

The California Clapper Rail (*Rallus obsoletus*) has afforded me many a happy hour at its marshy home. I have often thought that their awkward, apparently senseless, traits alone, ought to protect them from the hunter, yet the poor amateur sport who wades through the tall, wet marsh grass or sits shivering all day in his 'blind' without even getting a shot at a duck, is glad enough to pick up a rail or two on his homeward way; and we poor fellows who cannot hit a duck when we *do* get a shot, feel a thrill of delight when one of these birds rises from beneath our feet.

Once I flushed a rail from the grass a few feet ahead of me, and as he was lumbering off to a respectable shooting

distance, another rose and flew within two feet of my head. I "poked" my gun at him but was so much amused at his actions, I forgot to shoot. The first time I ever saw one running up a slough I laughed so hard at him that he stopped and looked at me for half a minute and then stuck his old head in a bunch of grass:—perhaps he was laughing *too*!

During several seasons of collecting, I have noticed that some days I would kill nothing but males of this species, while at another place only females were shot. Again when two of us were separated on the marsh one would procure males and the other females only. This would indicate that in the fall and

winter at least, the sexes resort to different feeding grounds. The birds fly very heavily and only for short distances but the fleetness of foot is as remarkable as it is ungainly. When wounded they make good use of their legs and claws as well as their bill. This rail rarely swims for the mere pleasure it affords, but it can often be seen crossing a large slough, and when injured is very agile in the water.

By the first of March the clattering of the rails on the feeding grounds is very loud and discordant, but soon the birds scatter and a month later full com-

home. The nests are uniformly composed of dry marsh grass placed under small bushes or sometimes exposed fully to the weather. Many become thoroughly water-soaked before the eggs hatch. The birds are very close sitters and a trained dog can often pick them off the nest. If surprised suddenly they will fly after jumping from the nest, but more often they glide directly into the slough or, unperceived, run along a trail in the tall grass.

Sets vary from six to twelve or more eggs. The young are said to be very interesting little creatures, and grow to



Photo by Adams.

#### NEST AND EGGS OF THE CALIFORNIA CLAPPER RAIL.

plements of eggs may be found. I have often seen two birds about a nest and I am certain that the male assists in incubation. The favorite nesting site is upon the banks of the numerous small sloughs which protrude far inland, yet occasionally a nest is found some distance from high tide mark, and I have observed half a dozen old nests, which I attributed to this bird, in barrels deposited at flood tide.

Like many other rails, *Rallus obsoletus* builds nests which it never uses. During the past season I often came across three or four new nests within a radius of about six feet, only one containing eggs. Most of these were never completed but a few seemed to possess all the advantages of the occupied

be amusing pets if kept under proper influences. Many writers of recent date have noted the lessening in the numbers of California Clapper Rail, but where I have collected on the San Francisco Bay they appear as plentiful as ever and breed in large numbers. The photograph accompanying this was taken in May 1899. The day was windy and as an exposure of three seconds was given, the picture was blurred to some extent.

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HENRY B. KAEDING of Taylorsville, Plumas Co., Cal, has accepted a position with a mining syndicate in Corea, and has disposed of his collection of skins to Mailliard Bros., the collection containing many Sierra Nevada forms.